

MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

SWEET COLTSFOOT

(*Petasites frigidus* var. *palmatus*)

DESCRIPTION

Sweet Coltsfoot is a perennial herb with a thick, horizontal root stalk which produces slender flower stalks in the spring, followed later by basal leaves. It ranges in height from 6-24" (15-60 cm.). Leaves are deeply, palmately cleft to much beyond the middle, green and glabrous above and whitened with dense felt-like hairs beneath. Flowers are whitish, fragrant, and each head (1/3-1/2" wide) is composed of many tiny florets without any showy rays, giving an overall flat-topped appearance. Flowering occurs during late April and May, although in Massachusetts it seems to seldomly flower.



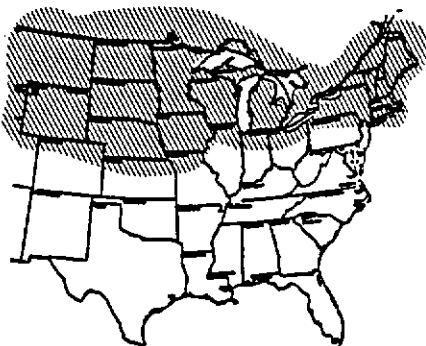
SIMILAR SPECIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

Tussilago farfara (Coltsfoot) is somewhat similar in appearance to Sweet Coltsfoot, however, its flowers are yellow and occur singly on stalks and its leaves are not deeply cleft. The habitat of the two species is also different. *T. farfara* inhabits rocky gravelly streams, moist roadside banks and rarely if ever occurs in swamps or bogs.

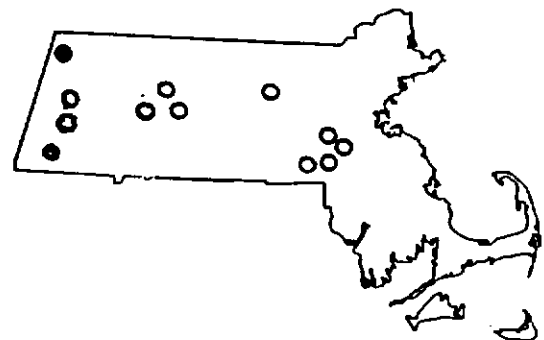
Britton, N.L. and M.A. Brown. An Illustrated Flora of the Northern United States and Canada. Dover Publications, Inc. 1970 reprint of 1913 ed.

HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS

Found in swamps and boggy streams particularly where there is cold subsurface seepage, Sweet Coltsfoot seems to prefer non-acidic soils. In certain locales it is found in hardwood and coniferous forested fens dominated by Red Maple, Black Ash, Hemlock, Yellow Birch and Red Oak; particularly locally colder areas with greater development of Sphagnum Moss, under White Pine, Hemlock and Red Maple. Sweet Coltsfoot is also found in wet, cold areas on hillsides growing (continued overleaf)



Distribution of Sweet Coltsfoot



● Verified since 1978
○ Reported prior to 1978

Distribution in Massachusetts by Town

SWEET COLTSFOOT (continued)

in rich humus and gravelly soil, co-occurring with species such as Hemlock-Parsley and Dwarf Scouring-rush.

RANGE

Sweet Coltsfoot ranges from Labrador to British Columbia, south to Connecticut, Wisconsin and California.

POPULATION STATUS

At the present time, Sweet Coltsfoot is considered a "Threatened" species in Massachusetts. Two current occurrences (1978 to present) have been reported; eleven other occurrences were recorded prior to 1978. Loss of suitable habitat and cutting and draining of wetlands have contributed to the scarcity of this species.